

COMMISSION ON CHILDREN'S JUSTICE
MARCH 10, 2003
MEETING MINUTES

Members Present: Judges John Holstein, Chair, Susan Block, Thomas Frawley, Nancy Rahmeyer, Roy Richter, and James Welsh; Commissioner John Payne; Senators Pat Dougherty, and Bill Foster; Representatives Catherine Hanaway, Bryan Stevenson, Yvonne Wilson; Julie Cole-Agee, Beth Dessem, Deanna Gallagher, Frank Martin, Steve Renne, Melanie Scheetz, Betty Sims, and Andrea Whitfield

Members Not Present: Judge Glenn Norton, Vice Chair; Senator Anita Yeckel (for Peter Kinder); Patrick Lynn

Guest Present: Judge Thea Sherry, Chair of Child Abuse, Custody and Neglect Commission

Commission Staff Present: Gary Waint and Lynette Ricks

I. CALL TO ORDER/WORKGROUP BREAKOUTS

The Commission on Children's Justice was called to order by the Honorable John Holstein, Chair, in the Division II Courtroom, Missouri Supreme Court, Jefferson City, Missouri at 10:00 a.m.

The Chair advised that the meeting would begin by breaking into workgroups and requested that each workgroup determine if the topics and recommendations are short term or long term.

Frank Martin distributed copies of two editions of the *West Plains Daily Quill*. Mr. Martin explained that, as of the first of the year, the *Quill* has decided to keep statistics to focus the public's attention on domestic violence, especially where children are victims. According to the newspaper, twenty-one Howell County residents have been arrested on charges linked to domestic violence against other adults since January 1, 2003, and eleven residents have been arrested on charges relating to children.

Judge Frawley, workgroup leader for Group Four and Chair of the Family Court Committee, provided a report to the Commission on one charge of his group. It was the consensus of the group that there should be early, mandated intervention by the court and a "status conference" should be held when the child is removed. The conference should be judge directed, mandatory, and held within three to seven business days. The purpose of the status conference is to discuss and resolve specific topics in order to insure access to courts. Judge Frawley reported these recommendations were discussed at the February

28 Family Court Committee meeting and that Committee agreed with the recommendations of the workgroup.

The Commission then broke into the assigned workgroups.

At approximately 11:15 a.m., the full Commission reconvened, at which time Gary Wait asked members to give workgroup notes to Lynette Ricks to be combined with what has been obtained from previous meetings.

The Chair called for approval of the minutes from the meeting of March 3, 2003. The minutes were approved as submitted.

II. GAL/CASA POSITION ON OPEN HEARINGS

Judge Welsh introduced Julieann Graves. Ms. Graves is an attorney, CASA volunteer, and guardian ad litem.

Ms. Graves is not in favor of open hearings. She has found print media and television coverage to be devastating to the emotional well being of a child. Ms. Graves requested that the Commission look at what is in the best interests of the children.

In response to a question by Judge Holstein, Ms. Graves stated that a pilot project to test open hearings may be beneficial.

Judge Welsh commended *The Kansas City Star* and the *West Plains Daily Quill* for “responsible journalism” regarding coverage of child welfare cases. He has not seen names included in articles. He stated that television journalists do not realize the damage caused by releasing names.

III. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Dr. Robert James Olson presented on behalf of Mr. Sidney James, father of Dominic James. Dr. Olson’s recommendation to the Commission is to increase accountability of DFS and the juvenile court.

IV. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Johnnie Harvill provided testimony regarding her experience with the child welfare system. Ms. Harvill believes that there is too much power given to one person in the system and that there should be limits for DFS caseworkers. She also believes that there should be trial by jury and clients should be allowed to choose their court appointed attorney.

V. FOSTER CARE PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Melanie Scheetz introduced Lori Ross, Executive Director of the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association. Ms. Ross distributed information regarding recruitment and performance standards of foster parents.

Ms. Ross stated that recruitment should be based on qualifications and practical and educational experience in fields related to work with children. Ms. Ross stated that foster parents need to be screened to make sure the needs of the children can be met, and training should be provided to the foster parents. Ms. Ross recommended that the training of foster parents move away from government/agency owned and operated models.

Ms. Ross also addressed “professional foster care” or “paid parenting”. Professional foster parents are trained employees of a public or private child welfare agency and receive a salary and benefits in addition to a monthly subsidy.

VI. BEST PRACTICES

Commissioner John Payne introduced Lori Burns-Bucklew, who has been a full time pro bono attorney for 13 years. Ms. Burns-Bucklew explained that Jackson County DFS is under a consent decree.

Ms. Burns-Bucklew explained that the Practice Develop Review (PDR) is an intense case study by a team of two people who are recruited community members trained to do the study. The team interviews all people involved in a foster care case and makes recommendations to the Division based on its findings.

Ms. Burns-Bucklew agreed to provide the Commission with information on the PDR’s and consent decree.

Ms. Burns-Bucklew also reported that Jackson County has a child protection attorney who reviews the reports when DFS wants to take a child into custody. The attorney reviews cases for legal sufficiency and ensures that all investigative facts are included. After the attorney reviews it, the assessment is passed on to the juvenile office.

VII. NEXT MEETING/ADJOURNMENT

The Chair advised that the next Commission meeting will begin at 10 a.m. by hearing reports from the workgroups. The meeting will adjourn at 1:00 p.m.